

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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OES-02 ACDA-10 AF-04 INR-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSC-05

NSCE-00 /064 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6286

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY BONN

USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 02657

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, XO, MPOL, FR

SUBJECT: INDIAN OCEAN: FRANCO-AMERICAN BILATERAL  
DISCUSSIONS

REF: PARIS 26662 OF 1974 (EXDIS, NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: HISTORIC FRENCH STRATEGIC INTEREST IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA IS LIKELY TO INCREASE. OUR ANALYSIS SUGGESTS THAT THE U.S. AND GOF SHARE SEVERAL KEY INTERESTS IN THAT AREA. WE RECOMMEND THAT THE U.S. CONSIDER CONSULTATIONS WITH THE FRENCH ON THE SUBJECT OF THE INDIAN OCEAN ALONG THE LINES OF THE SUCCESSFUL US-UK DIALOGUE. END SUMMARY.

2. FRANCE'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA DATES FROM THE 17TH CENTURY FRENCH COLONIAL HOLDINGS IN THAT OCEAN AND ALONG ITS PERIMETER. FRANCE HAS HISTORICALLY SEEN THE COUNTRIES ALONG THAT OCEAN'S LITTORAL AS POTENTIALLY IMPORTANT COMMERCIAL PARTNERS FOR FRENCH EXPORTS OF FINISHED GOODS AND IMPORTS OF RAW MATERIALS, AND THE  
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INDIAN OCEAN AS THE COMMUNICATION LINK WITH THESE AREAS.

IT WAS NOT BY CHANCE THAT THE SUEZ CANAL -- WHICH  
OPENED THE INDIAN OCEAN TO MORE ECONOMICAL TRADE -- WAS  
LARGELY A FRENCH VENTURE.

3. FRANCE'S FASCINATION WITH THE INDIAN OCEAN REMAINS  
STRONG TODAY, FOR REASONS GOING BEYOND THESE HISTORIC  
COMMERCIAL AND COLONIAL TIES. THE KEY ROLE OF THE  
MIDDLE EAST IN PROVIDING PETROLEUM TO EUROPE AND TO  
FRANCE MAKES THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA (INCLUDING THE PERSIAN  
GULF) A STRATEGICALLY CRITICAL AREA FOR THE SURVIVAL OF  
FRANCE'S INDUSTRY NOW AND FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.  
MOREOVER, THE INCREASED SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE  
INDIAN OCEAN IS VIEWED BY SOME FRENCH LEADERS AS A  
POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE SOURCES OF PETROLEUM, AS WELL AS  
TO THE GENERAL STABILITY OF THE AREA (A STABILITY WHICH  
THE GOF BELIEVES SERVES ITS INTERESTS).

4. IN RECENT YEARS, THE FRENCH HAVE DEMONSTRATED THEIR  
STRATEGIC INTEREST IN THE INDIAN OCEAN THROUGH TEMPORARY  
DEPLOYMENTS OF MAJOR FIGHTING SHIPS TO THAT AREA. MOST  
RECENTLY, THE FRENCH TEMPORARILY DEPLOYED ONE OF THEIR  
TWO AIRCRAFT CARRIERS TO THE INDIAN OCEAN. WE EXPECT TO  
SEE THE LEVEL OF FRENCH NAVAL DEPLOYMENTS MAINTAINED  
AND PERHAPS INCREASED.

5. ADDITIONALLY, THE FRENCH MAINTAIN MILITARY BASES OF  
STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE AT DJIBOUTI, LA REUNION, AND DIEGO  
SUAREZ (THE LATTER IS BEING PHASED OUT). WE ARE TOLD  
THAT A RECENT MEETING OF FRANCE'S DEFENSE COUNCIL (SMALL  
GROUP OF SENIOR MINISTERS CHAIRED BY THE PRESIDENT AND  
DEALING WITH DEFENSE ISSUES) CONFIRMED THE CONTINUED  
IMPORTANCE OF DJIBOUTI AND RESISTED BUDGET CUTTERS WHO  
WISHED TO ECONOMIZE THE DEFENSE BUDGET BY REDUCING THAT  
BASE. AS FRANCE'S SSBN FLEET INCREASES IN NUMBERS AND  
MISSILE RANGE, THE INDIAN OCEAN MAY BECOME AN ATTRACTIVE  
AREA FOR FRENCH SSBN (AND SSN) DEPLOYMENTS AND PERHAPS  
BASING. FINALLY, THE REOPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL IS  
LIKELY TO MAKE THE INDIAN OCEAN AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT  
ROUTE FOR FRENCH MERCANTILE AND MILITARY COMMUNICATION  
WITH THE EAST COAST OF AFRICA, THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF  
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THE MIDDLE EAST, AND ASIA. THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS  
BEHIND THE PLANNED MOVE OF FRANCE'S AIRCRAFT CARRIERS  
FROM THEIR BREST HOME PORT TO A NEW HOME PORT IN THE  
MEDITERRANEAN, TOULON.

6. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND OF GROWING FRENCH INTEREST  
IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA, WE BELIEVE THAT THE UNITED  
STATES SHOULD CONSIDER UNDERTAKING DISCREET AND REGULAR

POLITICAL/MILITARY CONSULTATIONS WITH THE GOF ALONG THE  
LINES OF THE ACTIVE BILATERAL DIALOGUE THAT WE HAVE  
WITH THE UK ON THIS SUBJECT. WE CANNOT PREDICT WITH  
CERTAINTY A POSITIVE FRENCH RESPONSE TO THIS TYPE OF

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 02657

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INITIATIVE FROM THE U.S. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE  
THAT GISCARD'S TRACK RECORD TO DATE SUGGESTS THAT HIS  
GOVERNMENT WOULD BE PREPARED TO APPROACH THIS SUBJECT  
WITH THE PRAGMATISM AND INFORMALITY WHICH WOULD BE  
NEEDED TO MAKE BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS USEFUL. CLEARLY'  
WE AND THE GISCARD GOVERNMENT SHARE CERTAIN SIMILAR  
INTERESTS IN THE AREA: A DESIRE TO MAINTAIN A POLITICAL  
BALANCE IN THE REGION FAVORABLE TO WESTERN INTERESTS;  
A NEED TO INSURE FREE COMMUNICATION ROUTES ACROSS THE  
INDIAN OCEAN; AND A SHARED PERCEPTION THAT INCREASED  
SOVIET PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE IN THE AREA MAY POSE RISKS  
TO EUROPEAN (INCLUDING FRENCH) AND U.S. INTERESTS. A  
US-GOF DIALOGUE ON THIS SUBJECT MIGHT SHOW THAT OUR  
COMMON INTERESTS IN THE AREA FAR OUTWEIGH OUR DIFFER-  
ENCES. IT MIGHT ALSO REVEAL POTENTIAL AREAS OF CLOSER

POLITICAL/MILITARY COOPERATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN.  
CERTAINLY, THE ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING OF OUR MUTUAL  
INTERESTS IN THE AREA WOULD IMPROVE PROSPECTS FOR  
POSSIBLE USE OF FRENCH MILITARY FACILITIES IN THE AREA  
BY US MILITARY FORCES.

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7. RECOMMENDATION: WE RECOMMEND THAT THE DEPARTMENT  
CONSIDER OUR PROPOSAL TO EXPLORE WITH THE GISCARD GOVERN-  
MENT THE POSSIBILITY OF UNDERTAKING CONSULTATIONS WITH  
THE FRENCH ON POLITICAL/MILITARY ASPECTS OF THE INDIAN  
OCEAN. WE CAN ENVISION SEVERAL SCENARIOS FOR US-GOF  
DISCUSSIONS: EXPERTS FROM WASHINGTON COULD VISIT PARIS  
FOR SEVERAL DAYS OF INFORMAL MEETINGS WITH FRENCH  
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CHARGED WITH INDIAN OCEAN AFFAIRS;  
ALTERNATIVELY, WE COULD INVITE A SMALL GROUP OF GOF  
EXPERTS TO TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON FOR CONSULTATIONS.  
ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT DISCUSSED THIS SUBJECT WITH THE  
GOF, WE SUSPECT THAT THE FRENCH WOULD BE PREPARED TO  
HANDLE CONSULTATIONS EITHER WAY. THE DEPARTMENT MAY  
ALSO WISH TO CONSIDER A TRILATERAL (US-UK-FRENCH) DIS-  
CUSSION OF SOME ASPECTS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN SITUATION.  
(WE UNDERSTAND FROM LOCAL UK SOURCES THAT THE FRENCH AND  
BRITISH DISCUSS INDIAN OCEAN ISSUES ON A FAIRLY REGULAR  
BASIS, BUT THAT NEITHER THE GOF NOR HMG HAS BEEN VERY  
FORTHCOMING IN THESE CONSULTATIONS.) WE WOULD APPRE-  
CIATE THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS ON OUR PROPOSAL. EMBASSY  
LONDON MAY WISH TO COMMENT ON THE TRILATERAL OPTION.  
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